CCS Conference

Presents

Strength-based Engagements of Families and Children

Presenter

Mark Sanders, LCSW, CADC
Definition

The strength-based approach views clients in light of their capabilities, talents, gifts, competencies, accomplishments, resilience, values, hopes, visions, dreams, and possibilities. The approach zeroes in on what clients know, what they can do, and resources that exist within and around them to help with the change process.
Many Traditional Approaches Inadvertently Leave Families Feeling Diseased, Stigmatized, Deficient, and Incapable

1. Problem focus

2. A search for what’s wrong

3. Intake questions
Traditional Intake Questions

• What brought you here?
• What is your address?
• What is your income?
• How can we contact you?
Traditional Intake Questions Continued

- Do you use drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for addiction?
- How many times have you relapsed?
Traditional Intake Questions Continued

- Have you ever been treated for mental illness?
- What were your diagnoses?
- How many times were you hospitalized?
- Have you ever attempted suicide?
- How many times?
Strength Based Intake Questions

• What do you do well?
• What skills do you have which have enabled you to endure so much?
• What do you like to do in your leisure time?
• What are the 3 best moments you can recall in your life?
• What is the best thing you ever made happen?
• What is your current or previous life suffering preparing you to do with your life?
Strength Based Intake Questions Continued

• What have you learned from what you’ve gone through?

• When you faced that challenge as a family, what sources of strength did you draw from?

• Which of your experiences have taught you the most about your own resilience?
Many Traditional Approaches Inadvertently Leave Families Feeling Diseased, Stigmatized, Deficient, and Incapable

4. Diagnosis on top of diagnosis on top of diagnosis

5. Counselor as expert
Many Traditional Approaches Inadvertently Leave Families Feeling Diseased, Stigmatized, Deficient, and Incapable

Continued

6. Practitioner develops the treatment plan

7. One-size-fits-all model

8. Language
Language Found In Social Work Literature

“The frail elderly”

“Gang-infested environment”

“Drug-infested environment”

“The helpless poor”

“Endangered species”

“Underprivileged”

“Dysfunctional families”
Principles of the Strengths Perspective

1. Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths.

2. Trauma, abuse, illness, and struggle are injurious and may also be opportunities for growth and purpose.

3. Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity of families and children to grow and change.
Principles of the Strengths Perspective

4. Take individual, family, and community aspiration seriously.

5. We best serve clients by collaborating with them.

6. Every environment is full of resources.
Strength Based Approaches From Various Fields

1. Education

Multiple intelligence – Howard Gardner, author of In Their Own Way – Our Education system has typically honored 3 types of intelligence

A. Reading comprehension (with the clock ticking)
B. Mathematical intelligence
C. Memory
8 Other Types of Intelligence Commonly Ignored

A. Bodily kinesthetic
B. Musical
C. Spatial
D. Linguistic
E. Interpersonal
F. Intrapersonal
G. Artistic
H. Emotional
Strength Based Approaches From Various Fields Continued

2. HIV movement

3. Person-centered movement

4. Counseling
Strength Based Approaches From Various Fields Continued

A. Client-centered approach

• Acceptance
• Client leads
• Warmth

B. Logotherapy - Victor Frankl’s Man’s Search for Meaning
Strength Based Assessment

1. Give pre-eminence to the client’s understanding of the facts.
2. Believe the client.
3. Discover what the client wants.
4. Use the assessment to discover uniqueness.
5. Use language the client can understand.
Strength Based Rapport Building

1. Get to know family members.

2. Focus on a strength and something each family member does well as soon as possible.

3. Form a partnership.

4. Engage in mutual treatment planning.

5. Invite solutions from the client.
Strength Based Counseling With Individual Family Members

Exploring additional strengths in counseling

Areas to explore:

1. What clients have learned about themselves during their struggles
2. Survival skills
3. Coping mechanisms
4. Observations of the world around them
5. Hidden talents
6. Pride
7. Transferable skills
Strength Based Counseling With Children

- Focus on what’s right with them
- Listen to them
- Point out strengths
- They are rarely the cause of family problems
- Advocate for them
- Reframing to help the world view them differently
- Affirmations – “You are…”
- Encourage them to dream about possibilities
Dr. Mae Jamison
Lieutenant Uhura
Strength Based Questions for the Family

Questions to ask:

Survival questions -

A. How have you managed to survive (thrive) thus far?

B. What was your mindset as you faced these difficulties?

C. What have you learned about yourself and your world during your struggles?

D. Which of your challenges have given you special strengths, insights, or skills?
Strength Based Questions for the Family
Continued

Support questions -

1. If you needed support, who is the one person you would call?

2. Who do you look to for guidance?

3. What associations or organizations do you respect most?
Strength Based Questions for the Family
Continued

Possibility questions –

1. What are your hopes, visions, and aspirations for the future?

2. What fantasies and dreams have given you hope?

3. If you were to give up __________, what would you look forward to?
Strengthening the Client’s Confidence That He/She Can Change

1. Ask questions that elicit change talk -
   A. “What would be a good first step?”
   B. “What obstacles do you anticipate and how would you deal with them?”
   C. “How will you go about making the change?
   D. “What gives you the confidence that you can do this?
   E. Discuss sources of support, hypothetical change, previous success.
“There is an advantage in every disadvantage and a gift in every problem.”

John H. Johnson
“Adversity introduces a many to himself and a woman to herself.”

Pat Riley